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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 001440

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: FAMILIES VISIT SHAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

REF: RANGOON 1357 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Family members of imprisoned Shan political and military leaders managed to visit the detainees for the first time since the GOB relocated them to remote prisons. Although several of the political prisoners signed documents with their attorneys that will facilitate legal appeals, we doubt the efforts will succeed. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) The wife of Hkun Htun Oo, chairman of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), told Emboffs that she and a lawyer had visited the pro-democracy leader on December 10 at remote Putao Prison in the far northern tip of Burma. This was their first visit since prison authorities relocated the Shan leader from Rangoon in November (reftel). According to his wife, Hkun Htun Oo appears to have regained some of the weight he had lost since his February arrest. During the visit, Hkun Htun Oo signed a power of attorney for his lawyer to lodge appeals in Rangoon. Attorneys for other Shan political prisoners informed us that this could be a good sign for their own efforts to file appeals.

13. (C) Poloff met the daughter of Shan State Army-North (SSA-N) leader General Hso Ten when she came to the Embassy on December 22 for a visa interview. The daughter, her mother, and a lawyer had just returned from visiting Hso Ten at Khamti Prison in the far north of Sagaing Division near the Indian border, where authorities had also relocated him in November. The GOB arrested Hso Ten and Hkun Htun Oo in a February roundup of Shan leaders that followed a meeting of Shan politicians and military figures to commemorate Shan New Year. Poloff recently learned from a U.N. source that General Hso Ten had also visited Wa Special Region 2 in early 2005 and held several meetings with Wa leaders.

14. (C) According to Hso Ten's daughter, the arduous journey from Rangoon to Khamti by air, road, and river required two nights. She found her father in good health, but bored with the tedium of prison life. The family plans to visit him once a month to take him medicine for diabetes and a heart condition. They estimate that each round-trip from Rangoon will cost at least \$200 per person, nearly a year's salary for a common laborer. During their 20-minute visit, Hso Ten also signed papers for a lawyer to file an appeal on his behalf in Rangoon.

15. (C) COMMENT: Lawyers for the Shan leaders hope to lodge all appeals before deadlines at the end of January 2006. The multiple sentences given to each prisoner, however, are tantamount to locking a gate with many padlocks. The attorneys have to appeal each verdict in turn and hope that judges concur, or at least agree to reduce sentences. We doubt their efforts will succeed. The Burmese regime seems inclined only to ratchet up pressure on ethnic groups opposing the regime. The harsh treatment of respected ethnic leaders alienates the ethnic groups from the central government further -- a tragic downward spiral. END COMMENT.

VILLAROSA